

# Business Plan Summary - 2003/04



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## Foreword

This is the second Business Plan of the National Contracts Service (NCS). The plan sets out our contribution to the LSC's Corporate Plan and the National Learning Targets, and how we will deliver this.

Since the process of establishing NCS last year, we have:

- established our remit and objectives;
- brought 37 new large national employers into work based learning;
- extended participation in work based learning for young people from 22,000 learners to over 40,000 learners at period 6 in the current year, including the roll up of contracts from local LSCs such as CITB;
- raised the quality of the provision we inherited from a position where only 21% of our contractors were getting through inspection without the need for any re-inspection to 54%;
- extended participation more widely to include employees aged 24 and over.

Our aim is to provide employer based national provision which is judged to be of the highest quality. Whilst we feel we have made a good start, we will continue to focus heavily, in partnership with our employers and providers, on improving the quality of provision. We remain acutely aware of the need to improve retention and achievement across the majority of NCS provision.

All contributions made through NCS contracts will of course count towards the local learning targets as agreed in individual local LSC strategic plans, and we will continue to improve the information flow to local LSCs on nationally contracted provision.

Marinos Paphitis  
Head of National Contracts Service

# 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL CONTRACTS SERVICE

## 1.1 Remit of the National Contracts Service

The National Contract Service (NCS) was established in order to provide an effective contracting arm for the LSC in its dealings with large multi sited employers and providers who represent them. The NCS is based in Coventry and is an operational arm of the LSC, contracting with employers and their learning providers in exactly the same way as the local Learning and Skills Councils.

The NCS provides a service to national employers, with the potential for 100 learners or more, who operate in more than one local LSC area (normally five or more) and who wish to operate a single contract with the LSC in England.

In addition, the NCS provides a service to training providers who act on behalf of national employers, as well as sector specific training providers. The NCS also seeks ways of encouraging the potential for employers to develop their entire workforce, not just those aged 16-24, and therefore also holds some other national contracts for a number of NVQ initiatives with employers for people aged 24+, as well as for national UFI sector hubs. All young people and adults involved in NCS work based learning programmes normally have employed status. In very rare occurrences where employed status is not currently an option, NCS only accepts such placements in full consultation and agreement with the local LSCs.

The NCS **is not** resourced or remitted to work with;

- national providers working on behalf of individuals or local SMEs;
- national voluntary organisations or charities dealing with individuals who are not their employees;
- general national learning projects/contracts where the focus is not on employed status work based learning leading to national vocational qualifications.

In summary the purpose of NCS is to:

- provide services to national multi sited **employers** who have a presence in than one local LSC area;
- to simplify the relationship between large employers across the range of LSC programmes;
- to engage new national employers in all aspects of work based learning;
- to facilitate Work Based Learning for Young People contracting arrangements for large specialist sector providers.

In order to achieve this role the NCS actively works with local LSCs to ensure that provision is effectively planned and that quality, health and safety and Provider Financial Assurance (PFA) standards are maintained for each employer/provider across the network. Each local LSC has agreed a lead person to work alongside NCS and an NCS member of staff has been identified to work with them. Local LSCs are invited to review and update their nominee as appropriate.

## 1.2 Role of the NCS Advisory Board

The role of the NCS Advisory Board is to advise on the strategic operation and development of the NCS in order to improve participation, retention and attainment in work based learning. The key priority areas for the Board are:

- to advise national and local directors on any policy and significant operational issues arising from the engagement of large employers;
- to advise on new business opportunities to maximise the involvement of major national companies in work based learning and wider workforce development, with a focus on work based learning for young people;
- to help identify and promote good practice;
- to consider the collective results of Provider Performance Review and its overall impact on provision, and advise on action to improve attainment and retention;
- to consider and inform the NCS Business Plan, including key performance benchmarks, and review progress on NCS defined targets;
- to represent and promote the NCS internally and externally;
- to receive presentations/papers from NCS executives and provide advice on policy/strategy, including the NCS marketing and communication strategies and plans;
- to consider and advise on the following:
  - the results of provider financial assurance and action to improve effectiveness;
  - the annual assurance statement from the Head of NCS to the LSC's Chief Executive;
  - reports on NCS operations received from the Council's Internal Audit Services, NAO, the Council's national PFA team or other bodies;
  - NCS internal controls.

## 2 OUR AIM AND OBJECTIVES 2003-04

### 2.1 Aim

To provide a highly effective and professional contracting arm of the LSC dealing with the needs of national and multi-sited employers, and learning providers who represent them.

### 2.2 Objectives 2003/04

Our key objectives for the 2003-04 year are:

- to continue the development of NCS systems, people and processes which enable effective contract management to take place;
- to deliver agreed participation levels as detailed in our 'Key Targets';
- to increase attainment of all NCS learners and the overall quality of our provision, especially framework completions as detailed in our 'Key Targets';
- to continue to raise the profile of NCS with our target market and engage a further 10 targeted national major employers into Work Based Learning;
- to implement the reforms set out in "Success for All", in particular three year development plans, three year funding agreements and floor targets;
- to support wider workforce development through the Over 24 Employee Initiative;
- to support the work of local LSCs and the Operations Directorate, including where appropriate leading on developments or acting as a test bed.

## 3 OUR RESOURCES

The NCS has three blocks of money which fund:

- work based learning for young people;
- certain NVQ based workforce development initiatives with national employers for employees aged 24 and over;
- NVQ Level 2 initiative (for the Professional Footballers Association).

In addition, the NCS has a block of money from the Provider Intervention and Development Fund (£1 million) to support quality improvement, as well as an administration budget for the functions we deliver "in house" and the services contracted out.

## Work based learning for Young People

### Core Budgets

Age Group	Budget	Average in Training
16/18	£67,165,669	30,770
19+	£22,034,331	10,257
Growth	£2,800,000	973

### Employee 24+ Initiatives

Budget	Number of Learners	Number of NVQs*
£25,000,000	21,000	15,800

\*The number of NVQs in 2003-04 will relate to some 2002/03 starts

### NVQ Level 2 Initiative (Footballers)

Budget	Number of Learners
£5.6 million*	1560

\*This budget is solely to support a second year of the Footballers programme until a Framework is developed which allows them to move to AMA/FMA

### Contracted-out, Marketing and Other Services

Budget	£3.8 million
Data Services	Marketing
Provider Financial Assurance	
Quality, and Health & Safety	
Call-off Contracts	

We will continue to use these resources to purchase high quality learning, to engage targeted national major employers in work based learning and, critically, to improve retention and achievement, **particularly Framework achievement.**

Underpinning the funding of learners is the Provider Intervention and Development Fund which we will use to support improvement in the quality of learning and one of the key measures will be the achievement of Framework completions. To assist in increasing achievement levels we will use these funds to bring about improvement in the following key areas:

- self assessment and development planning, including 3 year development plans as outlined in "Success for All";
- equality and diversity;
- learner retention and achievement;
- leadership and management;
- support to employers and providers with potential to be "excellent";
- development of qualified staff with a focus on key skills, assessment and verification, and basic skills assessment and support;
- the continued introduction and achievement of technical certificates.

In addition, we will also use our resources to encourage employers and providers, as appropriate, to improve learner safety, as well as to address sector specific issues.

## 4 Targets to be Achieved

The key targets we will be working with our employers and providers to achieve during the 2003/04 year and the 2003/04 – 2005/06 years as appropriate are:

<b>Programme</b>	<b>2002/03 Target</b>	<b>2003/04 Target</b>	<b>2004/05 Target</b>	<b>2005/06 Target</b>
<b>Participation</b>				
WBLYP (In Learning)	n/a	42,000	48,000*	50,000*
24+ Employee Initiative (New Learners)	21,375	21,000	To be reviewed	
<b>Retention &amp; Achievement</b>				
AMA (Framework Completion rate)	27%	35%	40%	50%
FMA (Framework Completion rate)	22%	30%	35%	40%
24+ Employee Initiative (NVQ Achievement rate)	60%	65%	65%	To be reviewed
<b>Quality Assurance</b>				
Percentage of Providers that achieve at least satisfactory grade at ALI Inspection	40%	55%	65%	75%
<b>Increased Employer Engagement</b>				
Number of New <b>Targeted</b> blue chip Employers engaged in Work Based Learning	20 – 30	10	To be Reviewed Annually	

\* Based on NCS Current staff resource

In addition to our key targets we have also agreed some process benchmarks:

### Benchmarks

- To facilitate 2 employer / provider network events aimed at continuous improvement and to provide the opportunity for local LSC involvement in these events;
- To produce monthly Management Information Reports for the NCS Advisory Board and local LSCs which meet their requirements – as agreed in consultation;
- To undertake 2 Provider Performance Reviews in respect of all NCS provision and to provide the opportunity for local LSC involvement in these reviews.
- Provider Performance Review progress:

<b>Provider Performance Review</b>				
	Autumn 2002	Spring 2003	Autumn 2003	Spring 2004
Excellent	1.1%	5%	8%	12%
Strong	12.5%	15%	20%	25%
Acceptable	28.4%	40%	50%	50%
Some Concerns	36.4%	30%	17%	10%
Serious Concerns	21.6%	10%	5%	3%

## 5 OUR STRATEGIES

A number of strategies will support the achievement of our objectives and key targets. These are:

- our internal structures and processes;
- our quality assurance improvement plan;
- our equality and diversity strategy;
- our marketing and sector strategy; and
- our communications plan.

### 5.1 Internal structures and processes

**5.1.1** Sector Account Managers (SAMs), acting as the key interface with employers and providers on all issues, remain fundamental to the success of NCS. SAMs have a three-way role with NCS accounts:

- quality assurance and development
- effective contracting
- new business and work force development

SAMs also have a key role in communicating with, and engaging, local LSC staff in all aspects of quality and Provider Performance Review for activity on their patch.

**5.1.2** The Planning and Contracts Team will continue to be responsible for all aspects of running the NCS including planning, communications to employers/providers and local LSCs, servicing the Advisory Board, liaison with other national office teams, production of management information, co-ordination of our Performance Provider Review process and management of our out sourced services contracts (PFA, Data Services and Quality and Health and Safety call off contracts).

**5.1.3** Underpinning our structure, we will continue to build on the systems and processes we have established over the past year. We will look in particular to:

- streamline our processes and forms;
- in liaison with other teams within the National Office, improve the management information we are able to provide, in particular to local LSCs as to the effectiveness of national provision operating within their areas;
- raise skill levels (internally and with our employers and providers) in respect of the effective use of management information, planning and profiling;
- extend the service level agreements we have with our PFA and data services contractors to other areas of our work, including the CITB provision with local LSCs and our UFI hubs to ensure roles and responsibilities and expectations are clear.

## 5.2 Quality Assurance Improvement Plan

**5.2.1** A key objective of the NCS remains that of ensuring the effective implementation of the LSC Quality agenda, together with the development of the Success for All agenda, specifically:

- to improve the quality of learning delivered and in so doing ensure levels of learner attainment are improved;
- to have confidence that all learners participating in NCS funded learning are undertaking their learning in a safe, healthy and supportive environment.

**5.2.2** The focus therefore remains on further developing the continuous improvement culture that has been promoted across the employer/provider base and that the core requirements of the LSC Quality Framework are fully integrated into employer/provider delivery. Where an employer/provider does not meet the quality thresholds serious consideration will be given to stopping the contract. In addition where an employer/provider achieves ALI inspection results of Grades 4 or 5 as part of the development action plan agreed, we will explore putting a hold on new learners until the quality of provision is improved.

**5.2.3** The key responsibility for the overall quality of learning and achievement lies with employers and providers. NCS Account Managers will work with them to ensure that progress is being made and that interventions and support is in place when appropriate. Support will also be available from the Quality and Risk Advisers within the NCS, along with an increased range of specialist call off contractors.

**5.2.4** The NCS priorities for the coming year are:

- to consolidate key systems and common standards within the NCS for:
  - the evaluation of the effectiveness of employer/provider self assessment processes and agreement of development plans;
  - the approach to Provider Performance Review across the range of NCS contracted provision;
  - pre and post inspection action plans;
  - the use of support funding including the Provider Intervention and Development Fund;
- to extend the scope and number of call off contractors to support employers and providers to give a wider range of high quality support;
- to ensure that all employers and providers have a robust self assessment and development action plan process in place which not only covers the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework but the wider LSC requirements on Health and Safety, financial probity and value for money;



- to identify the ongoing development needs of the Account Managers and provide time and structured support to meet those needs;
- to target the use of support funding;
- to promote as a key aspect of quality that employers/providers manage Health and Safety with the same level of expertise and to the same standards as other core business activities;
- to work with NCS employers and providers to implement the requirements under Success for All, including three year development plans, funding and floor targets.

**5.2.5** These priorities will be met by one or more of the following activities:

- provider network events focussing on key priority areas and facilitating the sharing of good practice;
- developing, mapping and refining key processes;
- working with individual employers and providers through the Account Managers, the Quality and Risk advisers, call off contractors and through the development of structured support packages for key interventions;
- targeted work with prospective and new accounts and with specific types of provision;
- the development and agreement of quality targets and expectations with providers and employers;
- analysis of trends from ALI inspections and Provider Performance Review;
- supporting providers and employers pre and post inspection;
- developing the skills of Account Managers and Quality and Risk advisers;
- working with and developing the call off contractors and NCS specific support materials;
- promoting and developing the implementation of the LSC response to Success for All with employers and providers.

**5.2.6** Success will be evaluated by;

- all employer and provider development plans reaching the NCS standard and being accepted as effective;
- an increase in line with our key target for the number of providers and employers classed as satisfactory or better through ALI inspection;
- a decrease in line with our support measure for the number of employers and providers graded as “serious concerns” overall at Provider Performance Review;

- the use of support funding leading to tangible and agreed outcomes;
- an increased range of support available from call off contractors with good outcomes and evaluation feedback from interventions;
- providers and employers having effective health and safety management systems, including in respect of accidents;
- health and safety and financial propriety becoming an integral part of the self assessment and development action planning process;
- the numbers of employers and providers meeting the requirements for three year funding and development plans.

## 5.3 Equality and Diversity

**5.3.1** NCS will continue to plan and deliver its equality and diversity strategies in line with the LSC national strategic objectives. These are:

- to develop the LSC as a champion of equality;
- to embed equality and diversity into all policies, programmes and actions;
- to develop the LSC as a model equality and diversity organisation;
- to report annually to the Secretary of State on progress.

We will act as a champion for equality by focusing our plans, resources and commitment on embedding good practice, innovative approaches and sustained effort throughout our employer and provider base. We will place emphasis on practical, targeted work with employers and providers, which will be consistent with priorities identified through Provider Performance Review coupled with labour market information.

### Progress to date

**5.3.2** In our first year of operation we focussed on the recruitment of female and males to non traditional occupations and learners from minority ethnic groups to Modern Apprenticeships.

While progress has been made at individual employer/provider level this is not readily captured by aggregation in the data reporting system. The changing mix of contracts, including the acquisition of providers like CITB and employers like Carillion has, overall, increased the gender balance towards males across our provision. See table below.

The entry of learners from minority ethnic groups to the programme has remained all most static and the percentage in learning has fallen.

NCS recognises that sustained work is required to contribute to the LSC objectives and that it needs to be based on improved data and more focused planning at local level.



July 02	Feb 02		July 02	Feb 02	
Male	72	81.3	White	97.2	98.04
Female	28	18.7	Minority ethnic	2.8	1.96

**5.3.3** We have therefore identified four key priorities to promote and achieve better equality and diversity. These will be delivered through defined objectives with, where appropriate, measurable targets. These targets will be set out in detail in an Operating Plan and subject to regular monitoring and review.

**Priority 1:**

**To focus on and develop three key aspects of learning provision through which success can be measured; recruitment and participation levels, retention rates, and achievement rates.**

**Objective 1**

- To identify and propagate good practice in the promotion of learning to under-represented groups.

**Objective 2**

- To help employers and providers improve initial assessment processes to facilitate accurate identification of learners' needs, aspirations and learning targets and support, including that for learners with additional social and/or learning needs.

**Objective 3**

- To help employers and providers identify and address barriers to achievement. As examples; learner-employee turnover; learning difficulties and disabilities, literacy and numeracy needs; the achievement of key skills, access to learning resources and time off for study.

**Priority 2:**

**To address the imbalance of gender in key occupational sectors; the under-representation of learners from minority ethnic groups in specified geographical areas; and any identified under-representation of learners with a disability across all sectors.**

**Objective 1**

- To extract from data, patterns of under-representation amongst minority ethnic groups, and devise locally appropriate plans and projects building on good practice.

**Objective 2**

- To develop localised and occupationally specific emphasis through targets, projects and provider support to promote sustained commitment to remove gender stereotyping.

**Priority 3:**

**To improve the collection, analysis and use of data to underpin strategy, planning and provider-level activity.**

**Objective 1**

- To research and identify relevant data sources, internally and externally, which will enable the setting of national, local, provider and occupational targets to underpin the priorities.

**Objective 2**

- To use disaggregated data to inform prioritising and decision-making relating to specific projects, plans and activities.

**Objective 3**

- To use the data more meaningfully when agreeing targets with employers and providers.

**Priority 4:**

**To continue to establish understanding and commitment, and to generate sustained action among employers and training providers to achieve our targets for equality and diversity.**

**Objective 1**

- To develop and deliver workshops, individual employer/provider consultancy support, and specific promotional materials aimed at translating awareness into specific implementation.

**Objective 2**

- To provide a programme of equality and diversity health checks aimed at identifying employer/provider performance issues which perpetuate barriers to participation and achievement.

**5.3.4** We will also continue to embed wherever appropriate, the principles of equality and diversity into its operational activity. In particular, we will:

- revise and highlight account specific equality and diversity performance indicators as a formal part of the 2003-04 contracting process, including providers engaged in the Over 24 Employee Initiative;
- engage with specialists from ALI, National Office, external consultancy, and other networks as appropriate on the topic of equality and diversity;
- work towards improved Provider Performance Review and grades for equal opportunity through the inspection process;
- making referrals to specialist professionals at the local level for example, providers of flexible learning resources (UK- Online, Learndirect, literacy and numeracy support agencies, ESOL provision etc);
- delivering briefings to NCS staff, employers and providers either as groups or at an individual level to provide relevant updates and feedback on our strategy, plans, targets and performance.

## 5.4 Marketing and Sector Strategy 2003/04

5.4.1 In 2002/03 the National Contracts Service achieved its objective of engaging 20-30 new, large, national employers in work based learning. This was achieved by a mixture of responding to unsolicited enquiries and a small amount of proactive marketing to targeted organisations.

Examination of the resulting contracts has identified that, whilst the number of employers was good, the average size of the employer, and hence the number of contracted learners, was smaller than desirable. Pursuing a similar strategy in 2003/04 would result in the number of accounts managed by NCS outstripping the Service's ability to manage effectively.

5.4.2 The marketing and sector strategy for 2003/04 is therefore to recruit a smaller number of larger, blue chip employers by proactive marketing. The strategy aims to achieve the following **objectives**:

- **to engage 10 organisations widely recognised as blue chip large, national employers in work based learning;**
- **to raise the profile of the National Contracts Service amongst its potential customers.**

5.4.3 These will be achieved by the following **actions**:

The NCS will:

- move from re-active to pro-active marketing by targeting specific employers for contact;
- carry out research to establish the most appropriate point and means of contacting the company given existing links with the Council and the history of training in the company;
- revise the criteria for contracting to state "at least 1000 employees and potential for at least 100 Modern Apprentices";
- in liaison with local LSCs use NCS senior account staff to contact the target company to establish the potential for contract within the range of funding products available to the Service;
- seek to minimise the time between first contact and signing of contract by providing a higher level of guidance and by simplifying the process leading to Initial Approval whilst remaining within the Council's procedures;
- develop links with key stakeholders via the Council's communication team and other means to promote the offer of the National Contracts Service;
- map current NCS contract activity against national sector profiles to identify significant gaps in provision;
- place an initial focus on the following key sectors:

Sector	Rationale	Key partners
Construction	Key national sector – identified as LSC priority	CITB, major employers
Public Sector Government	Minimal penetration in public sector to date	DWP, DfES, Inland Revenue, MoD, TUC
Health and Care	Existing range of large employers – sector legislation	BUPA, other key employers
Professional and Financial – ICT	To address sector imbalance in NCS provision	e-skills, existing + new large employer contracts

- identify and attend events attended by large national employers supported by appropriate marketing material where applicable;
- by end May 2003 launch an NCS website for use by existing and new employers, other providers, Connexions Service, potential learners and their families.

5.4.4 In addition, we will evaluate the CITB sector contracting and quality arrangements we are currently piloting to establish whether this is an effective future model for other sector based organisations.

5.4.5 The success of the strategy will be demonstrated by achievement of our Key Target of 10 new blue chip employers.

## 5.5 Communications

5.5.1 NCS Communications fall into the following main categories:

- Local LSCs
- Employers/Providers with contracts
- Referral Services

### Local LSCs

5.5.2 We will continue to work closely with all 47 local LSCs in order to ensure that our delivery fits into their local strategic plans and area reviews, and that NCS participation and outcomes are appropriately accredited.

We have identified a key contact with each local LSC and a member of the NCS team has been identified to lead on contact with them (see list at Annex 3). We will continue to develop this approach and when appropriate seek to strengthen our links with local LSCs.

5.5.3 We will issue copies of the current Business Plan and will be offering presentations to the Senior Management Team of each local LSC in order to ensure understanding of NCS aims and objectives and their impact on each location.

Through our key contacts we will also endeavour to fully involve local LSCs in:

- the Provider Performance Review Process;
- Quality work including the production of Self Assessment Reviews and Action Plans;
- Provider Financial Assurance.

In addition, we will involve local LSCs in our marketing activity to target companies within their area.

- 5.5.4** As time slots allow we will also provide updates at the LSC's NET conferences directly aimed at Executive Directors.

### **Current Employers/Providers**

- 5.5.5** We will hold two major residential workshops for all contractors in 2003/04. These will be held on:

- 17/18 June 2003
- 20/21 November 2003

- 5.5.6** The aim of the workshops is to provide contractors with knowledge through a wider range of mini workshops, access to topical speakers and updates on NCS performance. Additionally mini workshops will be provided throughout the year in support of our quality aims covering the Provider Intervention and Development Fund and our call off contractors.

- 5.5.7** Following a successful pilot, we will also continue to produce a short monthly newsletter 'Update' which will draw attention to all recent and forthcoming developments and where appropriate signpost employers and providers to the source material.

### **Referral Services**

- 5.5.8** Connexions and Careers Services continue to be the primary referral services for NCS programmes. We will continue to produce a detailed programme directory which will be supplied to all services. The directory will also be available in CD format and on the internet. Local LSCs will also receive this information.

### **Website**

- 5.5.9** We plan to finish a new website in 2003/04 which meets the need of the target audiences identified above. The NCS website will include:

- detailed information documents and forms for existing contractors;
- information and forms on how to become a new contractor;
- general information on NCS;
- the NCS directory of Apprenticeships with links directly to all providers/employers.

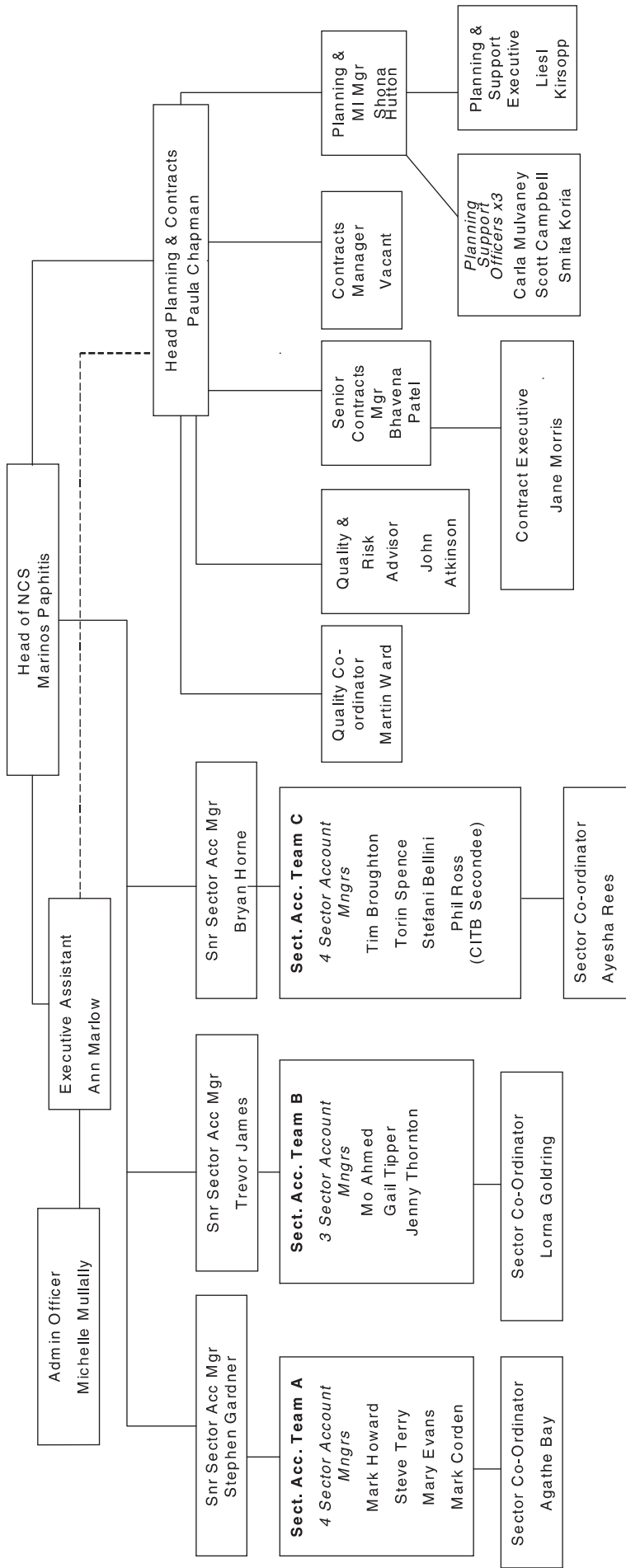
Additionally we plan to raise awareness of our services to key target employers through a targeted sales and marketing process – see section 5.4.

## **5.6 Account Targets**

- 5.6.1** We will continue to set individual account targets for each of our contracts, these targets will reflect the specific occupational challenges faced by each of the different sectors and will be focused on Framework completion rates.

Underpinning this key target area will also be agreed benchmarks, as outlined at 5.3 in respect of gender and ethnicity in support of our equality and diversity strategies.

# NATIONAL CONTRACTS SERVICE



## Members of National Contracts Service Advisory Board

Malcolm Gillespie (Chair)	Executive Director Coventry and Warwickshire LSC
Paul Binks	Technical Training Manager Kwikfit
John Browning	Contract Manager BP Oil UK Ltd
Verity Bullough	Executive Director London North LSC
Chris Cherry	Head of Workforce Development Sussex LSC
Keith Donnelly	General Manager Carillion
Toni Faezali	Assistant Director Quality and Standards, LSC
Steve Gray	Employee Development Advisor BAE Systems
Richard Healy	Assistant Director Finance, LSC
David King	Director of Operations and Corporate Services County Durham LSC
Steve Palmer	Executive Director Lancashire LSC
Marinos Paphitis	Head of National Contracting Service
Terry Tucker	Learning and Development Director Westminster Health Care
Roger Waters	Career Programme Manager BMW (GB) Ltd

Membership of the Advisory Board will be kept under regular review to ensure appropriate representation.

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**Learning+Skills Council**

National Contracts Service